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# Woodward's Book and Casey's Covert Hand

Did William Casey make a deathbed confession that he had known the Nicaraguan contras were receiving money skimmed from the sale of American arms to Iran?

When Bob Woodward first wrote the story for The Washington Post, the paper's editors decided not to print it. A nod and a couple of words from a sick man who had undergone an operation for a brain tumor struck them as too ambiguous to support a news story. Casey's widow later insisted that Woodward couldn't have been in the former Central Intelligence Agency director's hospital room — and that in any event Casey was

much too ill to speak intelligibly at the time.

But does anyone seriously doubt that Casey knew about the Iran-contra fund diversion? Oliver North has testified that Casey did, and the operation bears some of the same marks as a Casey initiative Woodward describes elsewhere in his new book:

Woodward writes that the old spymaster got President Ronald Reagan to authorize CIA training for preemptive counterterrorism by foreign nationals. Eventually the Saudi government chipped in \$3 million and arranged the car-bomb attack on a fundamentalist Moslem leader in Lebanon. When the bomb went off, 80 people died and 200 were hurt; the intended target was unharmed.

Did Congress refuse to appropriate funds for the contras? Never mind; somebody in the White House could find a way to get them money from Iran. Was the CIA forbidden to plot assassinations? No problem; just turn the job over to a Saudi regime that didn't have to worry about congressional oversight.

The message from Woodward's book and the Iran-contra hearings is the same. Covert operations by the executive branch were out of control. The chief operator may have been Casey, but the failure of control was Reagan's.